Chromatic Modulations in Popular Music

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1. Alice Cooper, “Poison” (Trash, 1989) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qq4j1LtCdww]
Through his lyrics, Alice Cooper portrays a man who strongly desires someone whom he can never be with. How do the changes in harmony reflect this and his frustration? How might the “poison” be suggested even without words in the first two chords of the introduction?

Intro
Verse 1 (0:38)
Your cruel device, your blood, like ice. One look could kill. My pain, your thrill.

D: I ____, d: ___ __ ___ ___ ____| ____ __ __ __
g: ______ Cadence: ___

The pre-chorus, a section that follows the verse and precedes the chorus, has more unstable harmonic changes. Note the recurring pattern in this pre-chorus, i VI III VII. To what key do the last two harmonies (d: III and VII) push toward? ______ Is that key ever attained?

Pre-chorus (0:56)
I want to love you, but I better not touch. (Don’t touch.) I want to hold you, but my senses tell me to stop…

Gm Eb Bb F Cm A♭ Eb Bb Am F C G Dm Bb F C

g: i VI III VII = c: ____ i VI III VII = a: ____ i VI III VII = d: ____||: i VI III VII :||

Discuss how other elements in the song support the text.

2. Avril Lavigne, “Sk8er Boy” (Let Go, 2002) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tly3n2b7V9k]
Like in Alice Cooper’s “Poison”—and for that matter countless others songs throughout the history of music(!)—Avril Lavigne’s song describes a subject who is attracted to someone whom she cannot be with, in this case due to teen peer pressure. How do the changes in harmony reflect this tension? Provide chord symbols for the given analysis, and analyze the last chord of the chorus in D major, marking a return to the key of the verse. Compare the motion in each phrase from the third chord to the fourth chord. What do they have in common?

Verse (0:21)
He was a boy; she was a girl. Can I make it any more obvious? He was a punk; she did ballet. What more can I say?
He wanted her. She’d never tell: secretly she wanted him as well. But all of her friends stuck up their nose.

They had a problem with his baggy clothes.

D: I V vi bVI, I V vi bVII :|| Then, bVII = F: ____

Chorus (0:47)
He was a skater boy. She said, “See you later, boy.” He wasn’t good enough for her.

F: I V IV V/ vi? :|| Then, IV = D: ____

Discuss how other elements in the song support the text.